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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR LAYS OUT PRIORITIES WITH FOREIGN MINISTER

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SUMMARY

1. (SBU) On August 31 Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem welcomed Ambassador Michalak to Vietnam and stressed the importance of continued progress in bilateral relations. During the cordial 40-minute meeting, the Ambassador emphasized areas of common interest and prioritized issues of ongoing concern such as human rights, legal and economic reform as well as the status of the Peace Corps, a new Embassy compound, and Vietnam's future role as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. End Summary.

WELCOME TO VIETNAM

2. (SBU) Khiem, who was recently reappointed as Foreign Minister in addition to his position as Deputy Prime Minister, opened the meeting by welcoming the Ambassador to his new position and added that, despite recent history, the two countries have a strong desire to move forward to the future and increase bilateral ties. Khiem highlighted the fact that President Bush's visit to Vietnam during last November's APEC summit and the June visit by President Triet to the United States have brought both countries closer together and quoted the 2006 U.S. - Vietnam Joint Declaration, "it is important for our two countries to establish broad-based foundations and deepen in a progressive manner."

3. (SBU) There is no reason bilateral relations should not progress and we hope to learn more from you in the area of science and technology, Khiem said. He added that issues of concern still exist but can be overcome by dialogue and continued frankness and honesty among friends. He cited Ho Chi Minh's declaration of freedom, taken directly from the United States Declaration of Independence, as evidence that both countries have many things in common and can overcome issues of concern through understanding.

4. (SBU) The Ambassador responded by thanking Khiem for welcoming him to Vietnam during such an exciting time as the country is filled with great opportunity. The Ambassador agreed that both countries want peace and security for their people and want better education in a complex world.

HUMAN RIGHTS

5. (SBU) The Ambassador said both countries have the same goals - human rights for all people, but at times have different ways of approaching it. He added that Vietnam has made progress in the areas of human rights and religious freedom but this is still an area of concern and we look forward to continuing our frank discussions on this issue. The Ambassador added that he appreciated

that the government realized how important it was for US Embassy staff to be able to meet with human rights dissidents on a regular basis. "The more we are able to meet, the more information we are able to share on the status of dissidents with our colleagues in Washington."

¶16. (SBU) In emphasizing this point, the Ambassador noted that a DRL-detailee was able to meet with a democracy activist only the day before without incident. However, the next day Embassy staff received false news reports from an Internet human rights site that police broke up the same gathering and eight democracy activists were escorted to a local police station. This is not the case and we were able to report the facts back to Washington. The Ambassador said it would be in Vietnam's own interest to have a free press which could easily respond to incorrect news reports with the facts.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: BUY BOEING

¶17. (SBU) The Ambassador highlighted the progress both countries have made in cooperation on anti-corruption, transparency and good governance issues and said further promotion of economic development between the two countries is also a priority. The Ambassador urged progress on a bilateral trade and investment agreement, which will bring about greater development in multiple sectors and create a welcoming environment for investors in Vietnam. The Ambassador added that Vietnam's goal of enhancing its infrastructure, especially transportation, is a lofty goal and urged the GVN to consider purchasing Boeing airplanes as Vietnam Air replenishes its fleet.

EDUCATION: PEACE CORPS CAN HELP

¶18. (SBU) After recently returning from the 15th Anniversary of the Fulbright Program in Hue, the Ambassador underscored the need to

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make education a priority and deepen relations in this field. The Ambassador pledged his commitment to double the number of students from Vietnam seeking to study in the United States. He added that there are a number of government programs available to aid students but that private corporations are also interested in promoting such programs. The Ambassador noted that having Peace Corps in Vietnam teaching English could help address Vietnam's educational needs, and added that with our two countries very close to an agreement we would like to close the deal as soon as possible.

NEW EMBASSY, MIL-MIL, AND UNSC

¶19. (SBU) The Ambassador expressed appreciation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs lead in helping to secure a new embassy. He stressed the need for new facilities and offered to be of assistance as the government of Vietnam makes its own plans to open a consulate in the United States.

¶10. (SBU) The US and Vietnam are building a strong relation as partners in search and rescue operations, the Ambassador said, with deeper cooperation possible between the two militaries.

¶11. (SBU) The Ambassador said the United States looks forward to welcoming Vietnam as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council as another step for Vietnam to enter in the world stage. He added that the international community will look to Vietnam as a vital partner in discussing matters such as North Korea, Iran and other issues that will come up before the Security Council.

¶12. (SBU) DPM Khiem end the meeting by stating that the priorities the Ambassador laid out are indeed areas where the two countries will make progress and said he looked forward to discussing them in-depth in the very near future.

MICHALAK